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President: Mr. Diogo Freitas do Amaral ..... (Portugal)

The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

Agenda item 42

Question of Palestine

Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/50/35)

Report of the Secretary-General (A/50/725)

The President: I should like to propose that the list of speakers in the debate on this item be closed at 4.30 p.m. today.

It was so decided.

The President: I therefore request those representatives wishing to participate in the debate to inscribe their names on the list of speakers as soon as possible.

I now call upon His Excellency Mr. Kéba Birane Cissé of Senegal, in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Mr. Cissé (Senegal), Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (*interpretation from French*): It is an honour for me to introduce the agenda item on the question of Palestine in my capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

This year, the United Nations celebrated its fiftieth anniversary. On that historic occasion, the leaders of the whole world solemnly reaffirmed the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter and their commitment to them. They expressed their determination that the United Nations will work with renewed vigour and effectiveness in promoting peace, development, equality and justice and understanding among the peoples of the world. They also reaffirmed the inalienable right of all peoples to self-determination, with particular attention to the situation of peoples under colonial or other forms of domination or foreign occupation.

The question of Palestine is the oldest conflict on the United Nations agenda, for the Organization has been concerned with it practically since its inception, it has provoked several wars in the region of the Middle East and over the years it has been the source of countless sufferings and loss of human life. The Assembly has repeatedly reaffirmed that so long as this question has not been resolved in all its aspects in a satisfactory manner and in accordance with international norms it will remain the United Nations responsibility.

Our Committee, established 20 years ago with the mandate of recommending a solution to the Palestinian problem, is convinced that a comprehensive, just and lasting solution of the question of Palestine must be based

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on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), on the principle of the withdrawal of Israel from all Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem, and from the other occupied Arab territories, on respect for the right of all States in the region to live in peace within secure and internationally recognized boundaries, and on the recognition and exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, primarily the right to self-determination, rights which must be guaranteed them. Those are basic principles that have been overwhelmingly endorsed by the international community and without which there can no lasting solution to this question.

The positive developments of the past few years since the beginning of the peace process at Madrid in 1991 has created a new climate in the relations among the parties and altered the realities on the ground, clearly mapping the path in the right direction. Despite the tragic event of 4 November of this year when an assassin's bullet ended the life of Israel's Prime Minister, Mr. Yitzhak Rabin, to whom we owe a large measure of the progress that has been made, it is our fervent hope that that act of violence will not lead to a setback in the peace process and that progress towards implementation of the agreements will continue. The Committee welcomed the statement by Israel's new Prime Minister, Mr. Shimon Peres, that the tragedy will have no adverse effect on the peace process to which Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization are committed. The outpouring of support by the international community, as well as by Israeli public opinion, clearly shows that the path on which the parties are engaged is the correct one and that they must persevere.

Notwithstanding the concerns created by the unstable situation on the ground, the Committee rejoices with the international community at the progress that was made in the negotiations over the past year, and especially at the signing at Washington, D.C. on 28 September 1995 of the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. That document supersedes all previous agreements on the implementation of the Declaration of Principles and provides for further withdrawals of Israeli forces, Palestinian elections and the assumption by the Palestinian Authority of various responsibilities in the West Bank, as well as for the gradual release of Palestinian prisoners and for cooperation and greater dialogue and mutual understanding among the parties.

The Committee hopes that this agreement represents the beginning of a new stage in which the Palestinian people will be able to move closer to the exercise of their inalienable rights to self-determination and sovereignty in their homeland and that both the letter and the spirit of the agreement will be implemented, thereby contributing to the establishment of a just and comprehensive peace. The Committee is committed to continue and intensify its support for the Palestinian people and their leadership during the transitional period and urges the international community to continue to do its utmost in this regard.

In this connection we welcome the initiatives — exemplified by the Second Middle East/North Africa Economic Summit held at Amman in October 1995 under the aegis of His Majesty King Hussein of Jordan — being made to facilitate the expansion of investment in the region and enhance regional cooperation and regional development, thereby promoting stability and an atmosphere conducive to peace.

The Committee also wishes to express its appreciation to the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, and his Representative in the occupied territories for having pursued their endeavours to coordinate assistance to the Palestinian people, which is beginning to bear fruit in a number of positive ways. The efforts of the donor community and United Nations bodies, especially the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, also must be noted.

For its part, the Committee, mindful of its mandate to contribute to the effective implementation of the agreements reached and to promote solidarity with and assistance to the Palestinian people, organized a number of productive seminars, meetings of non-governmental organizations and symposiums in 1995. The Committee is particularly grateful to Brazil for having acted as host last March at Rio de Janeiro to the Latin American and Caribbean Regional Seminar and the Latin American and Caribbean NGO Symposium, and to the French Government for its help in organizing the Seminar on Palestinian Administrative, Managerial and Financial Needs and Challenges at the Headquarters of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) at Paris in June. The Committee also held a North American Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine at New York and a European NGO Symposium and International NGO Meeting on the Question of Palestine at Vienna.

Participating in these various events were prominent Palestinian and Israeli personalities, experts from various regions, representatives of donor countries and of other

governmental and intergovernmental entities, agencies of the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations having some involvement with the Palestinian people. This showed that the Committee can play a valuable role as a forum for dialogue, exchange of information, mobilization of public opinion and action for peace, for the Palestinian people's exercise of its rights and for Palestinian socio-economic development.

Our Committee believes that, as the peace process advances, it must be accompanied by a considerable effort on the part of the international community to solve the various critical problems of the transition period, including unresolved political questions, such as the settlements, Jerusalem, the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and the Palestinian socio-economic situation.

In carrying out the clear political mandate given to it by the General Assembly, the Committee will continue to make adjustments in its programme of work to reflect the new realities in the region and make a useful contribution to the international community's efforts to bring about a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the question of Palestine, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions. In its endeavours the Committee will continue to rely on the assistance of the Division for Palestinian Rights of the United Nations Secretariat, whose contribution in monitoring, research, publications and the holding of seminars and meetings for non-governmental organizations has been particularly important and useful.

The Committee considers that, along with the Division for Palestinian Rights and the Department of Public Information, each in its own domain, it will continue to provide the necessary support for the United Nations in the exercise of its responsibility with regard to this question, until the peace process finally reaches its conclusion.

The Committee hopes that the States that support its objectives but have not yet participated in its work will consider doing so in order to enhance the contributions of the United Nations to the development of peace at this important stage.

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Joseph Cassar of Malta, Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to introduce the Committee's report (A/50/35).

Mr. Cassar (Malta), Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People: It is a pleasure for me, in my capacity as Rapporteur, to present to the General Assembly the report (A/50/35) of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People covering its work in 1995.

During the past year, the Committee has carried out its work on the basis of its mandate as determined by the resolutions of the General Assembly. The report covers important developments concerning the question of Palestine, the peace process and the activities of the Committee during the past year.

The introduction to the report is contained in chapter I, which indicates briefly the Committee's objectives and perspectives during the year. Chapters II and III are procedural and summarize the respective mandates of the Committee, the Division for Palestinian Rights and the Department of Public Information and give information on the Committee's programme of work. Chapter IV reviews the situation relating to the question of Palestine.

The Committee was encouraged that during the past year the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations have proceeded despite repeated delays and acts of violence which have taken many innocent victims on both sides and aroused the concern of the international community. In his statement, the Chairman of the Committee has already had the opportunity to transmit to this Assembly the feeling of the Committee in this respect.

On 27 August 1995, the parties signed at Cairo the Protocol on Further Transfer of Powers and Responsibilities. On 28 September 1995, the parties signed, in Washington, D.C., the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which supersedes all earlier agreements in the implementation of the Declaration of Principles. The Agreement reaffirms the parties' understanding that the interim self-government arrangements provided therein are an integral part of the whole peace process and that the negotiations on the permanent status, which will start no later than 4 May 1996, will lead to the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). The Committee welcomed these agreements and is determined to continue to support the Palestinian people and its leadership during the transitional period.

Despite these positive developments, the Committee noted that the situation in the areas still under Israeli occupation gave reason for concern and continued to create facts on the ground which had potential negative

effects for the future exercise of Palestinian rights and the peace process. The Committee also voiced its concern at the continued problems relative to the living conditions of Palestinians, in particular in the Gaza Strip.

Chapter V of the report provides a detailed overview of the various activities of the Committee and the Division for Palestinian Rights, in accordance with General Assembly resolutions 49/62 A and B. The Committee closely monitored the situation on the ground, and the Chairman addressed a letter to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council on the issue of the expansion and consolidation of settlements by the Israeli Government in the occupied territories. The Chairman also represented the Committee at the meetings of the Security Council on the same issue, as well as at meetings of various intergovernmental organizations. Furthermore, the Committee followed closely, and some of its members participated in, meetings of United Nations bodies and agencies, the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and intergovernmental organizations, at which various statements, resolutions and communiqués relevant to these issues were adopted.

As the Chairman has already stated, during 1995 the Committee sponsored a Latin American and Caribbean Seminar and a European Seminar on Palestinian Administrative, Managerial and Financial Needs and Challenges; jointly with the Seminar, a Latin American and Caribbean Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Symposium; an NGO Symposium for the North American region; and the combined United Nations International NGO Meeting/European NGO Symposium on the question of Palestine.

Finally, the report describes very briefly the many activities of the Division for Palestinian Rights of the United Nations Secretariat in the fields of research, monitoring and publications and in connection with a computer-based information system on the question of Palestine. It also describes the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

Chapter VI covers the work of the Department of Public Information in accordance with resolution 49/62 C, including the publications and audio-visual activities of that Department, as well as the journalists' encounters and new missions to the area.

Chapter VII, the last Chapter, contains the recommendations of the Committee.

The Committee reaffirms that the United Nations has a permanent responsibility with respect to the question of Palestine until a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement is reached, and that its own role continues to be useful and necessary during the transitional period. The Committee also reaffirms the basic principles on which the settlement of the question must be based, and calls on the Assembly to reaffirm its mandate with overwhelming support. The Committee also considers that a broadening of its membership to include countries that support its objectives but have not hitherto participated in its work would greatly enhance the contribution of the United Nations to promote peace at this important stage.

The Committee considers that its seminars on economic and social issues confronting the Palestinian people in the occupied territory have been particularly useful in bringing together experts in the relevant fields, including Palestinians and Israelis as well as donor countries, United Nations departments, agencies and organizations, and non-governmental organizations active in the field. The Committee has expressed its intention to continue its efforts in this respect, and believes that an event under its auspices should be held in the territory under the Palestinian Authority to address various aspects of the transition period.

The Committee has stressed its role in bringing together and developing a network of non-governmental organizations interested in the question of Palestine and in promoting solidarity activities, as well as concrete assistance. The Committee has expressed its intention to continue to promote the positive contribution of non-governmental organizations, and to continue its programme of meetings of such organizations, in cooperation with their coordinating committees, with a view to developing an effective and broad-based network of non-governmental organizations.

The Committee has emphasized the essential contribution of the Division for Palestinian Rights as a centre for research, monitoring, the preparation of studies and the collection and dissemination of information on all issues related to the question of Palestine, and has requested the Division to continue its activities in this regard, including those related to the computer-based information system on the question of Palestine (UNISPAL). The Committee has also requested the Secretary-General to maintain the political structure and composition of the Division in accordance with the

mandate of the General Assembly, and to continue to provide it with the necessary resources.

The Committee considers that the Special Information Programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information continues to be very useful in raising the awareness of the international community and in contributing to an atmosphere conducive to peace, and requests that the programme reflect the new experiences of the Palestinian people and provide assistance in the field of Palestinian media development.

In conclusion, the Committee has expressed its intention to continue to strive to achieve maximum effectiveness in the implementation of its mandate and to adjust its programme in the light of developments, in order to continue to contribute, to the extent possible, to the realization of the common United Nations objective of achieving a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine.

The President: In accordance with General Assembly resolutions 3237 (XXIX) of 22 November 1974 and 43/177 of 15 December 1988, I now call on the head of the Observer delegation of Palestine.

Mr. Kaddoumi (Palestine) *(interpretation from Arabic)*: It gives me pleasure, at the outset, to congratulate you on your election to the presidency of the fiftieth session of the General Assembly. We have great faith in your sagacity and your ability to conduct successfully the work of this historic session of the General Assembly.

It also gives me pleasure to greet, through you, your country, Portugal that has always been a friend of the Palestinian people.

I should like also to pay tribute to your predecessor, Ambassador Amara Essy, who presided over the forty-ninth session of the General Assembly. My thanks and greetings go also to the members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and, in particular, to its Chairman, Ambassador Kéba Birane Cissé. We also deeply appreciate the efforts of the Secretary-General, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, in the service of the peace process.

Fifty years have passed since the establishment of the United Nations — years full of problems, of issues, of events and of incidents — which have witnessed the solution of many conflicts, have contributed to the defusing of many war situations and have witnessed strides in the areas of development, rehabilitation and the upholding of human rights while the Palestinian question remained a permanent item on the Organization's agenda.

The Palestinian question has gone through very tense periods, has witnessed many wars that claimed tens of thousands of victims.

Recently, the peace process was launched in the region. The Madrid Conference was convened on the initiative of President Bush. The Palestinian people felt optimistic because of this initiative. They saw at last a glimmer of hope that they may be able to return to their land — Palestine — and looked forward to sovereignty and stability on their own land, in their own homeland. They became hopeful that their life as refugees would come to an end and that the end of their trials and tribulations was at hand.

After very difficult negotiations, the first agreement was signed with Israel in 1993 in Oslo and was followed by other agreements. Then began the implementation of those agreements. Unfortunately, however, Israel did not respect the texts of the agreements nor did it abide by the dates set for their implementation.

In fact, Israel declared that there was nothing sacred about dates or appointed time-frames and thus the process faltered and became plagued with prevarication. It became stalled on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks. On the Palestinian-Israeli track there has been a great deal of bloodshed, in Hebron and in other Palestinian cities. All this has caused people to lose hope in ever achieving the promised comprehensive just political solution. The rulers of Israel, meanwhile, continued to use the question of security in justifying their prevarication, their hesitation in implementing the agreements and their disregard for the texts, their meaning and their time-frames. By contrast, Palestinian commitment has shown that we have no intention of playing into Israel's hand. Then came the tragic assassination of the Israeli Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin — proof of the fact that terrorism has grown and developed in an Israeli climate that has been nurtured by Israeli parties. It is to be remembered that the Israeli Mossad has in past years assassinated several Palestinian leaders.

If we make mention of such facts and incidents, it is only to show that the difficulties faced by the Middle East peace process stem from the racist upbringing and repressive practices espoused by the extremist organizations and political parties in Israel.

The Palestinian people want peace. They are a people that needs peace more than any other nation on earth after 48 years of displacement and life in refugee camps. No one should ever doubt this. When the Madrid peace conference was convened, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians rejoiced, marched in peaceful demonstrations and put olive branches in the muzzles of Israeli guns in order to express their ardent desire for peace. However, when the negotiations faltered, when agreements were brushed aside, when corridors were repeatedly closed, when the policy of starving the Palestinians was pursued together with the policy of land expropriation, and building of settlements, when the agreement about Al-Quds was abrogated and the city was declared the eternal unified capital of Israel, together with the decision of the late Yitzhak Rabin to confiscate 53 hectares of neighbouring land, our Palestinian people lost much of their hope in a just and comprehensive settlement.

Our question today is as follows: will the conscience of humanity ever awaken? Will the leaders of Israel and its parties finally become convinced that peace is essential for them as well as for others? Will they realize that such peace will be achieved only through the search for a comprehensive and just solution that would guarantee the withdrawal of Israel from all the Arab- and Palestinian-occupied territories, including Al-Quds, in keeping with the resolutions of international legality and in response to the need to entrench the principles of peaceful coexistence on a basis of balanced interests between the parties concerned.

Israel's might and dominance at this point in time seem to have clouded its view of the future implications of the present changes in the international situation. This seems to have entrenched in Israeli minds concepts that are not in keeping with the behests of peace and security for all, for Israel as well as for its Arab neighbours. What seems to have become entrenched in those minds is the logic of force and the use of violence in imposing the solution such minds see as appropriate for the Middle East crisis.

Since the end of the Second World War the peoples and States of the world have striven for freedom and independence. The Charter of the United Nations has affirmed the right of peoples to self-determination. However, certain small peoples have not yet gained their freedom and independence and are still languishing under the yoke of foreign hegemony. Our Palestinian people are a case in point. Despite the many resolutions adopted by the General Assembly and the Security Council calling for the withdrawal of Israel and reaffirming the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, the Palestinian people still languish under Israeli occupation.

The problem of the Palestinian refugees is at the very heart of the Palestinian question. Peace in the Middle East cannot become a reality without the return of the Palestinian refugees to their homes to live in peace with their neighbours. The right to return was recognized in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and in the Declaration of Human Rights, and the United Nations must see to it that those principles are respected, in keeping with its Charter.

The position adopted recently by the United States has caused the Palestinian people much concern. The American Government has always been the first to affirm General Assembly resolution 194 (III) on the return of the Palestinian refugees, but recently it has appeared to be denying it. The American Congress has decided, a few days ago, to transfer the American embassy to Al-Quds and thus has contravened Security Council resolutions, complicated further the peace process between the PLO and Israel, and went against the Declaration of Principles signed on 13 September 1993 in Washington, which Declaration called for the return of the persons displaced in 1967 and for the setting up of a committee of the PLO, Israel, Egypt and Jordan to look into the ways and means of implementing this return, in keeping with Security Council resolution 237 (1967).

The Palestinian problem is at the very heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict. A comprehensive and just peace cannot become a reality without a just solution to that problem. It is our belief that the United Nations has an abiding responsibility to continue to search for a just solution to the problem of the Palestinian refugees, on the basis of internationally recognized rights. We call on the General Assembly to reaffirm those rights and to maintain the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), so that it may continue to discharge its responsibilities and carry out its duties towards the Palestinian refugees. We also call upon all States Members to continue to make their contributions to UNRWA's budget so that the Agency may continue to do its work.

The Oslo Declaration of Principles underscored the need for the holding of democratic elections in the course of the transitional period and affirmed the right of the displaced Palestinian people who were forced out of Palestinian territories in 1967 to return and to exercise their rights both as electors and as candidates. None the

less, Israel continues to refuse the return of those people who number more than 750,000 Palestinian citizens and thereby deprives them of exercising their civil rights. Israel also continues to hold thousands of Palestinian people prisoners in its jails and refuses to set them free in order to exercise those rights. Israel also refuses to implement the withdrawal and redeployment of its forces from all the towns, villages and Palestinian camps, and continues to keep the city of Hebron under siege. So, is it really possible to stage such democratic elections under conditions of Israeli occupation and continuing siege?

We agreed to the peace initiative proposed by the former American President, Mr. George Bush, in 1991, as it called for the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), which stipulate the withdrawal by the Israeli forces from all the occupied Arab and Palestinian territories, including the city of Al-Quds, in line with the land-for-peace principle. Israel, however, continues to prevaricate. It even refuses to abide by the very basics of settlement as set out in the agreements that have been concluded. Instead, Israel is trying to impose its own views and its own interpretation of the texts of the agreements. In the end, it has resorted to brushing aside those texts and, in their place, it has started presenting the Palestinian negotiators with the measures it deems appropriate for implementing the agreements. Israel has not respected neither the texts nor the agreed dates in those agreements. It is intent on entrenching its occupation of the Palestinian territories in different forms, not to mention the failure to achieve any progress on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks, which have continued to falter since the beginning of the peace process in 1991, because of Israel's intransigence. The United States of America has deployed outstanding efforts, but the Israeli Government has persisted in its posture and has continued to put forward partial solutions on those two tracks, as has been the case with regard to the Palestinian track. It is a known fact that Israel still occupies Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese territories, from which it should withdraw if it really wants peace. The Jordanian track has not been too complicated, because the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) had undertaken the task of negotiating with regard to the Palestinian West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

As we can see no progress worth mentioning has been achieved on those three Arab tracks, despite the agreements concluded between the Palestinians and the Israelis. Those agreements stipulated a transitional period as a test of intentions for both parties and of the possibility of making progress on that track. However, Israel has portrayed the transitional period as a limited stage of self-government, a concept we had already rejected from the very start, in the days of the previous American administration, because self-government only applies to minorities and we, with our numbers, are the majority — unless, of course, Israel wishes to limit its recognition of the Palestinian people to those who now live on the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip, and thus to ignore three and a half million Palestinians who live outside the Palestinian territories as refugees and as displaced persons.

The Palestinian question cannot be confined to the early transfer of competence from the civilian and military Israeli authorities to the Palestinian Authority. The Palestinian question, at its very core, is first and foremost about the return of the refugees and of the displaced persons, the removal of the Israeli settlements from the Palestinian territories, which now number 142 settlements, 124 of which are in the West Bank, and 18 in the Gaza Strip, the return of east Jerusalem to Palestinian sovereignty, the exercise by the Palestinian people of its sovereignty on its territory, the freeing of the thousands of Palestinians held in Israeli jails, the removal of Israeli control from the corridors so that the Palestinian citizens may enjoy freedom of movement in their homeland without need for Israeli passes, the freedom of importation and exportation without Israeli control and our full control over our natural resources, our central institutions — such as electricity, ports, airports, telephones. None of this has been accomplished so far.

We believe that free and democratic elections under international supervision must lead to the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, as we have just heard this morning from the President of the General Assembly, in keeping with resolution 181 (II) which established two States, the resolution which, in fact, was the birth certificate of Israel, and on the force of which the United Nations recognized Israel as a Member State. Now the United Nations, in keeping with its own resolution, has to recognize the Palestinian State whose establishment was declared in the Palestinian Parliament in exile, in 1988, in Algeria, and which has been recognized by many States throughout the world.

We are for a just and comprehensive peace. Ever since the Madrid peace conference, we have spared no effort in trying to achieve that very peace. We have made many concessions in the hope that the Israeli party would recognize our sincere desire for peaceful coexistence with the Israeli people on an equal footing, away from hegemony and domination and away from expansionist

ambitions. However, Israel's rulers still ignore these facts and use the pretext of Israeli security in justifying their prevarication in implementing the resolutions of international legality and their failure to honour the commitment to achieve settlement on the basis of the principle of land for peace.

Israel still refuses to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) so that its nuclear weapons may continue to threaten security and stability in the region and continues to refuse to submit its nuclear installations to United Nations inspection. This posture on the part of Israel is a source of doubts and suspicions with regard to Israel's intentions. Furthermore, the United States of America continues to supply Israel with the most sophisticated of advanced weapons. This imbalance of power must, as of necessity, hamper the peace process and, unless the problem is resolved, it will be impossible to establish regional economic development programmes or to promote economic cooperation. Peace cannot become a reality in the Middle East so long as those weapons of mass destruction continue to exist in the region.

Balance of power and of interests in the Middle East is the primary prerequisite for the establishment of a just and comprehensive peace. In this context, we should like to affirm here the need to maintain the unity of Iraq and its territorial integrity and the need to find the necessary means of putting an end to the suffering of its people. We should like also to reaffirm the need to take serious steps to put an end to the unjust embargo imposed on the sister country, Libya.

The United Nations, in its statements on the occasion of its fiftieth anniversary, reaffirmed its intention to save the coming generations from the scourge of war, to encourage the resolution of disputes by peaceful means and to stop the proliferation of nuclear weapons and of all weapons of mass destruction. It reaffirmed the right of all peoples to self-determination and its intention to protect the rights of the original inhabitants and of refugees. We look forward to seeing the application on the ground of these principles so that peace and stability may prevail in the world.

Mr. Yaacobi (Israel): It has been just over three weeks since the assassination of the Prime Minister of Israel, Yitzhak Rabin. Israel lost a beloved leader, a great statesman who initiated a historic change in Israel and the entire Middle East. I personally lost a close friend with whom I had worked for many years. Prime Minister Rabin paid for his commitment to peace with his life.

It is disturbing that there are people — fanatics, radicals and fundamentalists — who resort to murder in an attempt — a vain attempt — to prevent progress. Their goal is not just to murder people, but to murder the hope for a better tomorrow. We will never give in to those who wish to return us to the days of fear, of war, of hate. Israel is determined to continue on the path blazed by our late Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin, and our current Prime Minister, Shimon Peres. Peace is our continuing commitment. We know the risks of peacemaking, but we also know that there is no alternative. Only through peace can we hope to achieve the goals that we have set for ourselves for a better, secure future.

For over two years, Israel and the Palestinians have been on the road to a just and lasting peace. The road has been long and difficult. It takes true leadership on both sides to be successfully navigated. But this is the only road which can serve the peoples of the Middle East. Only with the signing of the Declaration of Principles by Israel and the PLO on 13 September 1993 did the prospects for achieving a lasting peace appear within our grasp. That Declaration set the conditions which will govern our relations for an interim period until a permanent status agreement is reached.

Since that September morning, we have reached several agreements designed to transform the Declaration of Principles from a paper agreement into a framework for working relations between our two peoples. On 4 May 1994, we signed the Gaza-Jericho Agreement, providing for the transfer of responsibilities in the Gaza Strip and Jericho to the Palestinian Authority. Later that year, the Palestinians received responsibilities for their own affairs in several civil spheres throughout the West Bank.

Then, the Oslo B Agreement was signed on 28 September 1995 in Washington. This Agreement provides for: the transfer of power to the Palestinian Authority throughout the West Bank; a redeployment of Israeli troops from the major population centres; and elections for a Palestinian Council. Palestinians throughout the West Bank will conduct their internal affairs. For the first time, Palestinian students will be taught from a curriculum selected by Palestinian educators. For the first time, Palestinian taxes will help to build an infrastructure and a strong, healthy economy. Early next year, residents of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip will participate in the first democratic, free and contested elections in their history.

We hope to initiate a new era in the Middle East — an era characterized by cooperation and peaceful coexistence between Egypt, Jordan, Israel, the Palestinians and others, an era based on dignity and mutual respect, where peace is not some abstract concept, but a daily reality.

May I say very frankly that it was so disappointing to hear the speech of the representative who preceded me on this rostrum just now. He spoke as if nothing had happened, as if we were not making progress, as if Israel had not suffered cruel terrorist attacks by Islamic fundamentalists, as if the agreements signed were not known to him or as if he were ignoring the significant progress.

It is very confusing to hear this message while having agreements with the authoritative leadership of the Palestinian people. Arriving at the Interim Agreement was not easy and its implementation is difficult. But despite the difficulties, despite the terror, despite the threats, the two sides remain determined to move forward. Two weeks ago, Israeli troops handed over control of Jenin, the first Arab city in the West Bank, to our Palestinian partners. Today, the transfer of responsibilities continues in Tulkarm; it is scheduled to be completed on 10 December. On 14 December, the Israeli Defence Forces are scheduled to complete their handing over of Nablus to the Palestinian Authority. Kalkiliya will be handed over three days later.

Fanatical terrorist groups still seek to undermine our progress. They kill innocent men, women and children. Radicals threaten their compatriots who are working towards the betterment of their people and for the betterment of generations yet unborn. We will not allow these extremists to succeed. To paraphrase Israel's founding father and first Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion: We must fight terror as if there were no peace and work towards peace as if there were no terror.

We are greatly encouraged by the success of the Palestinian Authority in combating terrorism in the Gaza Strip. We are confident that the Authority will continue this fight throughout the West Bank as well.

The first fruits of the peace process can already be seen. The Gaza Strip, for years one of the poorest areas, is beginning an unprecedented growth. Construction and building are the order of the day, due to foreign investment and contributions from international donors. For the first time in many years, Gazans are going out at night — not to protest, but to sit in cafés and dream of a better tomorrow.

Through economic development, we can eliminate the poverty and want that breed hatred and extremism. We call on the United Nations Member States and the international institutions to enhance economic and social development in Gaza and the West Bank.

The new reality that is being created on the ground today deserves international acknowledgement at the United Nations as well. It should be noted that some progress has been made. Nevertheless, there are still a number of General Assembly resolutions that do not reflect the new reality in the Middle East. The time has come for this body to refrain from adopting such resolutions. There are some anachronistic enclaves within the United Nations structure that should be eliminated as well.

Israel remains committed to continuing the peace process. We see no other way to serve the people of Israel, the region as a whole, the Palestinians and our future generations.

Mr. Razali (Malaysia): Today's debate in this Assembly coincides with the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. As we commemorate this special occasion, we hope that today's debate will promote and contribute to the peace process in the Middle East. We hope that this special occasion will serve as a reminder to the international community of its responsibility towards the Palestinian people.

The Malaysian Prime Minister, in his address on 29 September this year, during the general debate said:

> "In Palestine ... efforts continue to be made towards durable peace. That peace process must result in a Palestinian homeland, a viable State at peace with its neighbours". *(Official Records of the General Assembly, Fiftieth Session, Plenary Meetings, 12th meeting, p. 3)*

Mr. Oddum (Saint Lucia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Since the beginning of the Madrid peace process in October 1991, the world has witnessed encouraging developments in the Palestinian-Israeli peace process. About two months ago, we witnessed another major event of political importance: the signing of the Israeli-

Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip in Washington, D.C. on 28 September. We believe that the Agreement is another major step towards a durable and lasting peace in the Middle East, in particular in the occupied Palestinian territories.

About four weeks ago, the international community was shocked to learn of the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin of Israel. It is regrettable that such a deplorable incident happened amidst encouraging and positive developments in the peace process. We do hope that his demise will not adversely affect the peace process. No act of terrorism should be allowed to derail the peace process. The parties involved and concerned should work with renewed vigour and redouble their efforts in pursuit of peace.

The Malaysian delegation welcomes the pledge made by Prime Minister Peres to forge ahead with Israel's agreement with the Palestine Liberation Organization to extend Palestinian self-rule to the West Bank as agreed. As was observed by His Excellency Mr. Yasser Arafat in his address at the Special Commemorative Meeting of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations:

> "This historic Palestinian-Israeli reconciliation must be carried through as envisaged." *(Official Records of the General Assembly, Fiftieth Session, Plenary Meetings, 35th meeting, p. 30)*

While there has been some progress on the political front, the situation on the ground is far from satisfactory. While recognizing the importance of an agreement as an important step in a process in which two parties learn to trust each other, it is important not to ignore that what really matters is what happens on the ground in the daily lives of the Palestinians. It has been reported that, since the Oslo Agreement was signed in 1993, the standard of living of the Palestinians in the occupied territories has dropped by 25 per cent. This, to my delegation, is regrettable.

For peace to flourish, progress in the search for a political settlement would have to be realistically translated into rapid rates of economic growth and development, in particular to improve the socio-economic conditions of the population in the occupied territories. In this regard, my delegation shares the following view expressed by the Secretary-General in his report on the work of the Organization:

> "The peace process needs broad public support and without a visible improvement in the living conditions of the Palestinians this support will remain fragile". *(A/50/1, para. 742)*

He also draws our attention to

> "the damaging effects which closures of the occupied territories by Israel have had on the nascent Palestinian economy". *(ibid.)*

The Malaysian delegation remains deeply disturbed by the observations made by the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories in its twenty-seventh report, contained in document A/50/463. That report, covering the period from 1 April to 18 August 1995, concluded that:

> "the general situation of human rights in the territories still remained very serious" *(A/50/463, p. 5)*

and that

> "the situation of human rights in the occupied territories ... has not improved and has in certain respects even deteriorated further". *(ibid., para. 712)*

One of the factors cited in the report to which this situation could be attributed was the repeated closure and restriction on the freedom of movement in the occupied territories imposed by the Israeli authorities. Violations of human rights, ostensibly on security considerations, cannot be condoned.

Given the current structure of the Palestinian economy, with its dependence on Israel, any restrictions imposed on the mobility of Palestinian labour would exacerbate the economic hardship of the population living in these areas. As a result of the closure, the rate of unemployment has increased. Before the imposition of the closure, there were about 120,000 Palestinians working in Israel. The closure has also had an adverse effect on the income of the Palestinians derived from exports of agriculture and agricultural produce. The daily losses owing to the continuing closure have been estimated at $8 million. The restrictions on agricultural exports from the Gaza Strip have been estimated to cost farmers $2 million a day. This situation needs to be urgently addressed.

Another issue of concern to my delegation is the continuing policy and practices regarding the settlement policy. My delegation is disturbed to note from the report of the Special Committee to investigate the Israeli practices that

> "the expansion of existing settlements has continued unabated." *(A/50/463, para. 729)*

According to the Committee's report, plans for the significant expansion of 11 settlements and the construction of 7,728 new homes in 1995 had been approved by the Israeli authorities. Various methods used to confiscate land were also reported. Such policy and practices are illegal, as they violate article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention. They also constitute a violation of relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions.

The support of the international community is vital to ensure the success of the peace process. The international community must, therefore, continue to demonstrate its commitment and to fulfil its responsibility. The hard work of reconciliation and reconstruction has only just begun. To strengthen the advocates of peace and to isolate the enemies of peace, we need the political and economic support of the international community. It is important that the pledges from the international community be well coordinated and realized in the form of large, rapid disbursement, for the immediate benefit of the local population.

The United Nations, too, has a role to play. In this regard, we share the view expressed by President Arafat that the United Nations

> "should continue to sponsor our Palestinian cause, alongside the Israeli-Palestinian agreements, until the implementation of our inalienable ... rights, including the right of our people to return, self-determination and national independence." *(Official Records of the General Assembly, Fiftieth session, Plenary Meetings, 35th meeting, p. 30)*

The Malaysian delegation has always maintained that until these objectives are met the United Nations has a permanent responsibility towards the Palestinian people. In fact, close cooperation between all relevant players, including the United Nations, the Bretton Woods system, Member States and non-governmental organizations, is important to growth and development in those territories. Development is a prerequisite for lasting peace.

As for Malaysia, we should like to reaffirm our total commitment to, and unwavering support for, the Palestinian people and its leadership in the attainment of all its inalienable rights to exercise self-determination and to establish an independent State. We are opposed to any attempt to deny the Palestinians their rights in Jerusalem and to any attempt to undermine the credibility of the present leadership. This was emphasized by the Prime Minister of Malaysia in his address to the Assembly during this session's general debate, in which he stated:

> "The attempts to weaken the present Palestinian leadership by undermining its credibility will only result in the rise of extremism and a protracted and bloody intra-Palestinian conflict which will spill over into Israel and elsewhere." *(Official Records of the General Assembly, Fiftieth Session, Plenary Meetings, 12th meeting, p. 3)*

Lastly, it is the hope of my delegation that the forthcoming elections in the occupied territories will take place as scheduled. It is our hope that the elections will be held in a peaceful manner. The international community should therefore support the Palestinian people in building their political system on the basis of democratic plurality and on the basis of freedom.

Mr. Maruyama (Japan): In the annals of the Middle East peace process, the year 1995 will be recorded as one of significant achievement and profound loss. After long and difficult negotiations, this past September Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization reached an agreement on expanding Palestinian interim self-government. Japan heartily welcomed this agreement as an important milestone, and at the signing ceremony, held in Washington, its Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Yohei Kono, paid high tribute to the parties on both sides for their courage and determination.

But just one month later came the tragic and, indeed, heartbreaking news of the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. Peace-loving peoples everywhere mourned the passing of this great statesman and servant of his people. Japan strongly hopes that the parties concerned will not let this violent incident deter them from their objective, but will remain steadfast in their resolve to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace throughout the Middle East.

The ongoing Middle East peace process was launched with the courage and commitment of the leaders

of the parties concerned. Despite the loss of Prime Minister Rabin, it has become clear that the tide of history cannot be reversed. The peace process will move forward. As they gathered at the State funeral of their fallen colleague, the leaders of countries from around the world insisted that the peace process must not be permitted to languish, and affirmed that the parties concerned would have the undivided support of the international community.

What is required now is the smooth and prompt implementation of the agreement on the expansion of Palestinian interim self-government. Israel's new Prime Minister, Mr. Shimon Peres, has declared his determination to continue the efforts of his late predecessor and push the peace process forward. He has proclaimed that the Israeli forces in the West Bank will be redeployed and that the election of a Palestinian Council will be held on schedule. As a matter of fact, Israel withdrew its forces from Jenin on 13 November.

As Prime Minister Murayama affirmed in the course of his visit to the Middle East this past September, Japan is steadfast in its support for the peace process, and will cooperate to the best of its ability by providing both goods and personnel required for the election of the Palestinian Council. It will do so in the belief that the establishment of the first democratic system of Palestinian self-government, based on free and fair elections, will stabilize the situation in the region and ensure that the overall peace process is successful.

Recognizing that assistance to the Palestinians is one of the most important pillars of its contribution to the peace process, Japan pledged $200 million for the two-year period beginning in September 1993. To date, it has disbursed over $150 million of that amount through various international organizations — directing its assistance, for example, to helping cover the start-up costs of Palestinian self-government and to health and educational projects aimed at raising the living standard of the Palestinian people. It has also decided to extend a portion of its assistance directly to the Palestinian people. Japan will continue to provide the same positive assistance it has been providing.

The Middle East peace process, particularly the Palestinian track, is entering a crucial phase. Along with the implementation of the agreement on the expansion of Palestinian interim self-government, extremely difficult issues must be addressed, including the negotiations on a permanent status agreement. Japan hopes the parties concerned will confront these issues with wisdom and fortitude so that the Palestinian and Israeli peoples can look forward to a secure and prosperous future. For its part, Japan will spare no effort to promote the Middle East peace process and to contribute to the social and economic development of the region.

Mr. Al-Nahyan (United Arab Emirates) (*interpretation from Arabic*): I wish to join previous speakers in extending thanks and appreciation to Ambassador Kéba Birane Cissé, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and the members of the Committee, for their unremitting efforts in following up the Palestinian question and its developments. The United Nations, since its inception, has performed an important role in supporting the Palestinian people's struggle for self-determination and the establishment of its independent State on its national soil through the adoption of numerous resolutions that today constitute the underpinnings of the ongoing peace negotiations between the Palestinian Authority and Israel. Those United Nations resolutions have also provided the basis of the Declaration of Principles and other agreements, the latest of which as been the Taba agreement of September 1995 whereby Palestinian autonomy has been extended to areas of the West Bank that had been under occupation since 1967.

The United Arab Emirates has always been in favour of a lasting and comprehensive solution to the question of Palestine. We have always reaffirmed the need to abide by the resolutions of international legality and have provided humanitarian, financial and developmental support to the Palestinian Arab people in order to alleviate its suffering under Israel's occupation of its homeland. We view the Israeli-Palestinian agreements as a preliminary first step towards the establishment of a Palestinian State with its capital at Al-Quds Al-Sharif, Jerusalem, on the basis of Security Council resolutions, *inter alia*, 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), as well as the principle of land for peace.

Notwithstanding the progress achieved so far, we are deeply concerned, as is the international community as a whole, at the obstacles to the peace plan put forward by the Israeli authorities, *inter alia*, the delays in implementing the agreements concluded between the Palestinian National Authority and Israel, in releasing of Palestinian prisoners, in dealing with violations of human rights, as well as the continued confiscation of land, the laying of seige to Palestinian towns and villages and the expansion of settlements, especially in Al-Quds.

The design of "Greater Israel's Jerusalem" which Israel has been trying to implement through the entrenchment of its occupation, its Judaization of the Holy Sites, its expulsion of the Palestinian and Arab inhabitants, the changes it is introducing to the demographic characteristics of Al-Quds and its endeavours to have foreign embassies transferred to the city are all in flagrant violation of Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, particularly Security Council resolution 478 (1980).

The credibility of the Israeli Government requires that Government to demonstrate the sincerity of its intentions towards peace by taking positive steps that would be in keeping with the search for a just and durable peace. Such steps should put an end to the attempt of changing the demographic composition of Al-Quds and should prove that Israel is really prepared to put in place the arrangements it committed itself to in this respect.

The repeated acts of violence and attacks perpetrated by Israeli settlers daily against the defenceless Palestinian people are the inevitable result of the tacit support extended to the settlers by the Israeli Government, either in the form of weapons and financial subsidies that finance their activities, or by the absence of laws and regulations that would deter them from engaging in such terroristic activities. The containment of this very dangerous phenomenon requires, in the first instance, addressing its root cause, namely, the continued Israeli occupation of Palestinian towns and villages and the deteriorating humanitarian condition and everyday life of the Palestinian people as a result of its deteriorating developmental, economic and social conditions. Consequently, the United Arab Emirates reaffirms yet once again that if the process of Palestinian-Israeli peace is to succeed, Israel must honour its undertakings in the agreements it has concluded with the Palestinian National Authority. The international community, for its part, must honour its undertakings by continuing to provide assistance to the Palestinian people in order for that people to be able to satisfy its needs and to rebuild its infrastructures which have been destroyed during the long years of occupation.

The peaceful and just settlement of the Palestinian question will never be achieved without the establishment of the independent Palestinian State. This, again, will never be achieved without Israel's complete withdrawal from all the occupied Arab and Palestinian territories, especially Al-Quds Al-Sharif, the dismantling of the settlements, the return of the Palestinian refugees and displaced persons to their homeland and the adherence by Israel to the agreements it has concluded with the Palestinian National Authority in implementation of the resolutions of international legality.

Mr. Kittikhoun (Lao People's Democratic Republic) (*interpretation from French*): On 14 May 1948, when the United Kingdom withdrew its forces and terminated its Mandate, the State of Israel was established. According to the Partition Plan approved by the General Assembly on 29 November 1947, an Arab State was also supposed to be created. To our profound regret, that Arab State has not yet been born. It is our fervent hope that an Arab State that will be a good neighbour and friend to the State of Israel may be established in the very near future, thereby putting an end to this painful Israeli-Arab conflict that is today more than four decades old. My delegation, with measured optimism, wishes to make a positive contribution to this debate and to that process.

On the whole, there have been positive developments in the situation in the Middle East, despite certain setbacks. After the signing of the Declaration of Principles in Washington in 1993, Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization have continuously demonstrated their wisdom and have done their utmost to ensure that the peace process remains on track. The Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement to extend Palestinian self-rule to the West Bank of the Jordan, signed on 28 September 1995, marked a new, significant stage in the implementation by the two parties of the Declaration of Principles. The Lao People's Democratic Republic welcomes this positive development and believes that it represents an important step towards the enjoyment of the fundamental national rights of the Palestinian people.

The question of Palestine, as we all know, is not new. We have all witnessed and participated in the deliberations surrounding it, and it is almost five decades old today. We are living in a new era — an era of dialogue and cooperation — and it would not be in the interest of either regional or world peace for this conflict to continue. The international community as a whole must therefore do everything possible to further the peace process to which both parties have committed themselves. For its part, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, faithful to its consistent policy of peace, friendship and cooperation with all countries of the world, will spare no effort to make its positive contribution to the effort of the two parties — Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization — to continue their negotiations so as to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement,

based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), as well as other relevant General Assembly resolutions.

The road to peace is not smooth and no doubt still seems long. Indeed, we are witnessing exactions and repeated acts of violence in the occupied territories. Those practices must cease immediately so that conditions conducive to the peace process can be established. The two parties have clearly demonstrated their good faith concerning the comprehensive implementation of the Agreements signed, and thus the peace process has every chance to succeed. This cause of peace is just. In our view, promoting it is an endeavour whose fulfilment is worthy, lofty and noble.

Mr. Poernomo (Indonesia): As this Assembly, at its historic fiftieth session, is once again taking up the question of Palestine, it is fitting to recall that no other conflict has so preoccupied the Organization as that concerning Palestine. It cannot be denied that the United Nations has exerted more efforts to bring about a just settlement of this question than any other conflict situation brought before it. Indeed, since its very first session the General Assembly has been seized of the unremitting search for a peaceful resolution of this conflict that would lead to the attainment of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and independence.

Throughout the ensuing years, scores of initiatives and decisions have been taken to bring about a just and negotiated solution to the question of Palestine, based on the relevant United Nations resolutions. In this context, it is appropriate to recall that as early as 1955 the newly emergent states of Asia and Africa met in Bandung and recognized that the denial of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination constituted the root cause of the Middle East conflict and affirmed their support for a just settlement. This firm solidarity was reaffirmed in the Declaration adopted during the observance, in Bandung in April 1995, of the fortieth anniversary of the Asian-African Conference.

Above all, the international community has been steadfast in calling upon Israel to abide by Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). The Government and people of Indonesia have maintained an unwavering commitment to the expeditious implementation of these resolutions.

Today, as we renew our consideration of this agenda item, the Middle East peace process has continued to witness developments of far-reaching significance. The historic signing of the Declaration of Principles two years ago has been followed by a number of important agreements, most recently the Cairo Protocol on Further Transfer of Powers and Responsibilities, of 27 August 1995, and the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip signed in Washington, D.C. on 28 September 1995. The latter instrument, which *inter alia* provides for further Israeli withdrawal from areas in the West Bank, as well as Palestinian elections to an Interim Self-Governing Authority, constitutes another important step towards the realization of the cherished aspirations of the Palestinian people.

Although we have witnessed positive developments and major breakthroughs in the peace process, numerous obstacles and challenges still lie ahead. Delays and shortcomings in the implementation of the Declaration of Principles must be urgently overcome. In addition, acts of senseless violence and the perpetration of political assassinations, including that which has tragically taken the life of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, must not be allowed to adversely affect the peace process. At the present crucial stage in the peace process, it is, indeed, imperative that the agreements already reached be expeditiously and fully implemented. Furthermore, we deem it essential for the parties concerned to begin earnest negotiations on the remaining areas and the final status issues, including Jerusalem, settlements, borders and refugees.

Progress towards the attainment of Palestinian rights requires drastic improvements in the people's economic and living conditions. As we have come to acknowledge, political and socio-economic development are mutually interdependent. Decades of occupation have had a devastating effect on the socio-economic infrastructures in the occupied territory. It is therefore essential for the international community to extend every assistance to the Palestinian Authority to promote sustainable development and prosperity for all Palestinians. In this regard, we are pleased to note the important strides made by the Palestinian Authority over the past year, not only in establishing its own administration, but also in significantly improving the living conditions in its area of responsibility. Indonesia is, however, acutely aware that the economic well-being of the Palestinian people is intimately linked to the wider Middle East and North African region. We are therefore gratified to note that the proposals emerging from the Middle East/North Africa Economic Summit held at Casablanca in 1994 were later reiterated in the joint communiqué issued by the

concerned parties on 12 February 1995 at Washington, D.C.

This event was particularly significant as it constitutes an initial step towards integrating the Palestinian economy into the broader regional framework and in transforming the region from an area of conflict and poverty to one of peace and prosperity.

Given the enormity of the tasks in providing overall guidance and facilitating international assistance to meet the short- and long-term needs of the Palestinian people, it is only fitting that there has been a notable increase in the involvement of the United Nations system in these efforts, as reflected in the activities of the United Nations Special Coordinator, Mr. Terje Rod Larsen. We are indeed heartened by this development. The Indonesian delegation also commends the role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, whose dedicated and tireless efforts have not only alleviated the plight of Palestinian refugees, but have also contributed immensely to the field of socio-economic development which is so crucial at this stage of the peace process. My delegation is also pleased to have been associated with the work of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People in mobilizing the international community and world public opinion to the sacred cause of the Palestinian people.

In conclusion, it is undeniable that the United Nations bears a historical responsibility as regards the question of Palestine until a final settlement is reached in all aspects. In this regard, its full engagement in the peace process as well as its assistance in the building of essential infrastructures and extending assistance in the economic, technical and development fields to the Palestinian people should be sustained and intensified. Through such a process we are confident that a new chapter in the history of the Middle East region will be opened — one that is marked by stable peace, harmony and justice.

Mr. Hallak (Syrian Arab Republic) *(interpretation from Arabic):* The United Nations dedicates the 29 November of every year to the celebration of the Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People — a people whose calamity and displacement date back to the beginning of the past five decades. This is a people who, since 1948, has constituted the largest mass of refugees and displaced persons and of people languishing under foreign occupation and domination.

The magnitude of the Palestinian tragedy has been such that from the very beginning, the United Nations had to set up a Relief and Works Agency especially for the Palestinian people, and has kept the just cause of that people as an item on its agenda to this day. Notwithstanding, the injustice and oppression the Palestinian people has been subjected to, still continue because Israel continues to deny the Palestinian people its fundamental national rights, the right to establish its own independent state on its soil and the right to self-determination.

The Foreign Minister of my country addressed a letter this morning to the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People wherein he reiterated and reaffirmed Syria's continued support for the Palestinian people in its struggle, its just struggle, to recover its legitimate national rights, foremost among which is its right to self-determination on an equal footing with all other peoples. The letter reaffirms that Syria, whose history has been closely linked with defending the rights of the Palestinian people and the Palestinian cause, remains loyal and committed to its principles and will continue to work for the achievement of a just comprehensive peace on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) as well as on the basis of the principle of land for peace.

I cannot but seize this opportunity to pay a tribute to the Chairman and members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for their efforts in preparing the report contained in document A/50/35. The report states:

> "... the situation in the areas still under Israeli occupation gave reason for concern and continued to create facts on the ground that had potential negative effects for the future exercise of Palestinian rights and the peace process itself." *(A/50/35, para. 22)*

Moreover, paragraph 118 of the report states that the settlement must be based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the withdrawal of Israel from the Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and other Arab territories occupied since 1967.

The whole world is well aware of the fact that the Palestinian question is the quintessence of the Arab-Israeli conflict. It is the cause of an entire people, whose territories have been occupied and whose rights have been usurped. Two thirds of that people live in exile, while the rest languish under occupation. There is no

doubt that putting an end to the occupation and withdrawal by Israel from the territories it has occupied since 1967, the recognition of the right of the Palestinian people to return to its homeland, compensating the Palestinian people for its losses in terms of property, and apologizing to it for the historic injustice it has endured for half a century are the fundamental prerequisites for the achievement of a lasting and just peace.

Al-Quds is part of the Arab territories that have been occupied since 1967. All measures aimed at changing its status will always be null and void, in accordance with the resolutions of the Security Council and the principles of international law. Any attempt, by any party, to change the status of the city will carry the seeds of many dangers, because it would flout the principles of international law and of international legality.

In this connection, the Syrian Arab Republic has found it strange indeed for the American Congress, as the United States legislative authority, to adopt a resolution that contravenes the norms of international legality. In a statement made on that occasion, the Syrian Arab Republic has reminded the United States of America, as sponsor of the peace process, of the guarantees it gave to Syria, during the Madrid peace conference, that the United States of America would not recognize the annexation of the Golan and east Jerusalem. The Government of my country hopes that the United States of America will respect its resolutions and maintain their credibility, and thus refrain from offending and infringing the rights of millions of Arabs, Muslim and Christian alike.

The Council of the League of Arab States, at its 104th session, adopted a resolution on Al-Quds that reaffirmed not only the Arab identity of the city but also Palestinian sovereignty over it, and recalled the Council's resolution 4328, which specifies the measures to be adopted by any State that transfers its diplomatic mission to Al-Quds or recognizes it as the capital of Israel.

Recent developments in the peace process have shown that Israel is not really seeking a peace that would put an end to conflict, to occupation and to settler-colonialism — a peace that would guarantee security and stability for all. On the contrary, Israel has focused on obtaining from those negotiating with it signatures on hundreds of pages and maps that would shackle the Palestinian people, after the sacrifices it has made, and put it on an endless road of suffering, trials and tribulations, rather than open any road towards liberation and independence. Instead, Israel has sought to entrench its interests through a distorted peace that would infringe the sovereignty and dignity of the Palestinian people, trample the principle of land for peace, ignore Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), legitimize the occupation of Arab territories and that would never guarantee the rights of the Palestinian people, without which no one could talk of a just lasting peace. Peace that is imposed through the imposition of the conditions of one party on the other and that creates a sense of injustice will never lead to anything but renewed tension and instability.

The road to peace is very clear and known to all. The existence of any people or State cannot be guaranteed at the expense of the existence of other peoples and States. The security of States cannot be based on territorial expansion and occupation. Those who try to delude the world into believing that peace has become a reality only delude themselves, for peace cannot coexist with occupation and with the denial of the rights of others. Peace can exist only in the existence of justice and respect for international legality and the principles of international law.

Mr. Kharrazi (Islamic Republic of Iran): Today marks the annual International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, and on this occasion I should like to reiterate once again the support of the Government and people of the Islamic Republic of Iran for the Palestinian people and their just cause.

During the past 50 years, the question of Palestine has been featured prominently on the United Nations agenda, and it remains the most enduring subject since the establishment of the United Nations. However, the Palestinian people continue to suffer from extremely poor living conditions under the occupation, and the latest report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People (A/50/463) indicates that their situation has deteriorated in many aspects during the past year. According to this report, the general human rights situation of the Palestinians in the occupied territories remains very serious and a matter of grave concern. The inhumane practices of the Zionist regime, including the sealing off or closure of areas of the occupied territories, the demolition of homes, the confiscation of land and the expansion of settlements, have resulted in violations of the fundamental freedoms of the Palestinian people.

A continuing source of tension in the occupied territories is the existence and expansion of settlements. In previous years, the violent actions of armed Jewish

settlers caused the deaths of a large number of Palestinians. One instance of such crimes was the horrible massacre of innocent worshippers in the Al-Ibrahimi Mosque in Al-Khalil by settlers protected by the Zionist regime's army.

The expansion of settlements in the last two years has been clearly highlighted in the report of the Special Committee, which reiterates that the situation regarding the expropriation of land is particularly serious in Jerusalem. Israeli authorities have carried out a deliberate policy aimed at reducing the number of Arabs and Muslims in Jerusalem and creating a new demographic, geographic and political situation in the city. According to the report

> "This policy has intensified since the signing of the Declaration of Principles", *(A/50/463, para. 733)*

and the practice of closing Jerusalem has worsened over the last year.

It is the view of my delegation that the international community should particularly condemn such practices of the occupying Power, as well as measures and decisions taken by those countries that help the Zionist regime in altering the character and status of the Holy City of Jerusalem.

The increasing killings, detentions and mistreatment of detainees are among other aspects of the generally inhumane practices of the occupying forces in Palestine. During the past year, Israeli undercover units martyred several Palestinian activists within and outside the occupied territories. Furthermore, the Zionists continue to practise aggravated forms of torture in interrogating the Palestinians, which have sometimes resulted in death. As stated by the Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices, the situation of Palestinian prisoners detained in prisons in the occupied territories and conditions of detention have actually deteriorated since the signing of the Oslo and Cairo Agreements.

Israeli mistreatment of the Palestinian people is in line with the overall policies of the Zionist regime to dominate the region through, *inter alia*, continued occupation of Palestine, southern Lebanon and the Golan Heights. The same policy is pursued through enhancement of Israeli nuclear-weapon technology, which continues to go unchecked. The existence of nuclear-weapon facilities in Dimona is an open secret which threatens the entire Middle East region. That is why Israel is so adamant about rejecting the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and putting its nuclear facilities under an International Atomic Energy Agency safeguard regime.

Therefore, through such flagrant violations of international law, one can see why Israel tends to create imaginary threats so that its misdeeds in the region and beyond can be justified. It is clear to all impartial observers in the Middle East that the passage of time has not changed the realities prevailing there. Equally clear is the fact that the mere communication of analyses of the situation by those familiar with the history of the region does not in any way affect the success or failure of the process. The root causes of the problem must be addressed if we are to find a just solution to the problems in the Middle East.

It is in this context that we believe that a comprehensive and just solution to the question of Palestine and the other occupied territories lies in the full realization of all rights of the people of Palestine, including the return of all Palestinian refugees to their own land, which will enable them to exercise their inalienable rights to self-determination and the liberation of all occupied Palestinian, Lebanese and Syrian territories.

Mr. Allaghany (Saudi Arabia) (*interpretation from Arabic*): Allow me on behalf of my delegation to express my thanks and appreciation to His Excellency Ambassador Kéba Birane Cissé, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian people, as well as the members of the Committee, for their sincere efforts in carrying out their noble task and making international opinion aware of the Palestinian question and its various developments.

Once again the General Assembly discusses the Palestinian issue in its multifarious dimensions as it remains the central issue, the crux of the conflict between Arabs in Israel. In fact, it means that it is the main access — the most important one — for achieving any worthwhile progress in the peace process and the Middle East.

Over the past few weeks, we have witnessed some very important and positive developments within the overall framework of the peace process in the Middle East that started in Madrid back in 1991. Those developments, which were welcomed by the Government of my country, could never have been possible without the will and steadfastness of the peoples of the region and

their determination to forge ahead despite difficulties of all kinds. Obviously, there is no denying that there has been progress towards peace. However, we are still concerned because of the repeated acts of violence which aim at hampering the peace process as well as the continued enforcement of some Israeli policies, such as the expansion of settlements, collective punishment, the repeated closure of the occupied territories and, therefore, the isolation of holy Al-Quds, as well as non-adherence by Israel, the occupying authority, to the Fourth Geneva Convention.

The international community expects from Israel some very concrete confidence-building measures. However, Israel has done exactly the opposite. Thousands of Palestinians still languish in Israeli jails and if a few of them are released they are not allowed to go back to their villages, their homes and cities and are even compelled to live in other areas. In addition, the policy of annexation and settlement continues to be practised.

Today, between 60 and 70 per cent of the occupied territories are still in Israeli hands, either in the hands of the military forces or in the hands of the settlers. The persistence of Israel in trying to change the demography of the Palestinian land breaches United Nations resolutions and runs counter to the commitments and undertakings Israel took upon itself in the Declaration of Principles. Here we should like to refer to the statement by the Committee in its report (A/50/35) regarding the continuous responsibility of the United Nations.

The Government of my country believes that the peace process in the Middle East is based on a comprehensive percept that takes into account all the political, economic and social aspects which must be addressed in an analogous and harmonious manner in order for us to reach the comprehensive solution we all desire. Consequently, the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine must be based on resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), on the withdrawal of Israel from the Palestinian territories, including Al-Quds, the first of the two Qiblas, the third holy shrine, from all the other Arab territories which have been under occupation since 1976, and the withdrawal by Israel from southern Lebanon in compliance with Security Council resolution 425 (1978).

It is true that the Declaration of Principles between Israel and the PLO has been followed by implementation Agreements and that the Declaration of Principles provides for an interim five-year period during which Israel will withdraw from Gaza, Jericho and the West Bank and will redeploy its forces in the remaining Palestinian occupied territories. It is expected of the two co-sponsors of the Madrid Peace Conference to force Israel to honour its undertakings and to stop obstructing the process, especially now that the Agreement on the second stage of the Declaration of Principles has been signed not long ago in Washington. According to that Agreement, the Israeli forces will be redeployed, preparations for the first Palestinian elections will take place, and further spheres of competence will be transferred to the Palestinian self-government authorities. All this will fully guarantee political stability and will constitute a qualitative leap on the Palestinian track. Therefore, Israel's insistence on holding on to Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its so-called eternal capital does not change the fact that Al-Quds is part and parcel of the Arab territories that have been under occupation by Israel by Israel since 1967 and, consequently, the resolutions of international legality apply to Al-Quds just as they apply to any other part of the occupied Arab territories.

Also, the deteriorating economic and social conditions in the West Bank and Gaza are cause for concern and call for alertness and attention. We welcome all the efforts made to organize international conferences of an economic and financial nature to provide financial assistance to the Palestinian people. In this context, the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has pledged, during the international conference for donors, held in Washington in 1993, to offer 100 million dollars to the World Bank programme in order to fulfil the most urgent needs of the Palestinian economy, as well as another pledge to provide 100 million dollars for the Palestinian National Authority during the ministerial meeting on the coordination of assistance held in Washington on 29 September 1995. My Government will continue to provide all the assistance it can to help Palestinians achieve the right to self-determination and their legitimate aspirations after the establishment of their independent State. The positions and stances of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia towards the legitimate and inalienable rights of the Palestinians are based on its absolute belief in the legitimacy of those rights and on its full respect for the objectives and principles enshrined in the Charters of the United Nations, of the League of Arab States and of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

The report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, as contained in document A/50/463, paints a very bleak and unchanged picture of the deteriorating

human rights situation of the Palestinian people in the occupied territories. The report very clearly states that the main reason for tension and instability in the occupied territories is the continued existence of Israeli settlements. Such continued tension and instability pose a threat to peace and security in the region. Peace is peace. It does not take too many interpretations to define the meaning of peace. It is defined very accurately in the resolutions of the United Nations and in the pledges of the two co-sponsors of the Madrid Peace Conference, the United States of America and the Russian Federation.

The role of the United Nations in the peace process relates in particular to the exercise by the Palestinian people of all its rights. In this context, we should like to commend the efforts of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and of the specialized agencies of the United Nations in preparing the Palestinians to handle their affairs once the responsibilities are transferred to the Palestinian Authority.

Over the past 50 years of its life, the United Nations has faced different crises, which have varied in intensity and in the seriousness of the threat they posed to international peace and security. Since 1947, the United Nations has been seized of the question of Palestine, the core issue of the Arab-Israeli conflict, in the General Assembly, in the Security Council and in the various bodies and specialized agencies of the Organization. The reason for this is that the United Nations bears a continuing responsibility towards the question of Palestine, a legal, political and moral responsibility the United Nations should continue to shoulder until such a time as a final, just and lasting solution to the issue of Palestine is reached in conformity with the resolutions of international legality.

Mr. Wang Xuexian (China) *(Interpretation from Chinese)*: The late Prime Minister of Israel, Mr. Yitzhak Rabin, made vigorous efforts and an important contribution to the promotion of the Middle East peace process. His assassination is a major loss for the cause of peace in the Middle East. I wish to take this opportunity to express once again, on behalf of the Chinese Government and people, our profound condolences to the Israeli Government and people.

Since the last session of the General Assembly, important progress has been made in the Middle East peace process. Jordan and Israel have formally established diplomatic relations. Syria and Israel have also conducted many rounds of substantive talks.

Not long ago, Palestine and Israel formally signed, after arduous negotiations, the Israel-Palestine Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which represents an important outcome of the negotiations on extending self-government in Palestine following the signing of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements in the Gaza Strip and Jericho Area by Palestine and Israel in May last year. It also represents another important step towards the complete restoration of their legitimate national rights to the Palestinian people and towards comprehensive, fair and lasting peace and stability in the Middle East. We welcome and support these developments.

China has held all along that the Palestinian question is at the core of the Middle East question. A fair and reasonable settlement of this question at an early date and the restoration of their legitimate national rights to the Palestinian people will contribute to peace, stability and development in the Middle East region as a whole. We are pleased to note that, with the help and support of the international community, the Palestinian people have made fresh progress in their nation-building.

The Middle East peace process is now at a critical juncture that calls for comprehensive and effective implementation by all parties concerned of the agreements already reached and the adoption of measures to consolidate the progress already made to avoid any setbacks or back-sliding. With the further deepening of the negotiations, the questions involved will be increasingly complicated and sensitive. The parties concerned should therefore continue to overcome obstacles, using a flexible and pragmatic approach, and make persistent efforts for all-round progress in the peace talks. We are convinced that, so long as the Palestinian people make unremitting efforts for their cause and continue to win the sympathy and support of the international community, the sacred objective of restoring the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people will finally be achieved.

Over the years, the international community, particularly the United Nations, has made positive and important contributions to the promotion of the peaceful settlement of the questions of Palestine and the Middle East as a whole. We are pleased to note that the United Nations has taken a more active part in the assistance projects and programmes for the Palestinian people in the past year. At present, full-scale reconstruction has yet to be undertaken in the Palestinian self-rule areas. With the further expansion of self-rule areas, the Palestinian

Interim Self-Governing Authority is facing the arduous and pressing task of reconstruction and therefore urgently needs the support and assistance of the international community.

At the same time, regional economic cooperation and economic development have also achieved good momentum in the region thanks to the relaxation of the Middle East situation. The second Middle East/North Africa Economic Summit, held in Amman, Jordan, conducted intensive and in-depth discussions on the improvement of the economic environment and the promotion of economic development in the region. A number of concrete results were achieved.

We believe that the United Nations has a permanent responsibility for the question of Palestine until a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement is reached. We hope that the United Nations will not only muster the support of the international community for the smooth implementation of the Palestine-Israel agreement, thus continuing to play a positive role in promoting a comprehensive and fair settlement of the Palestinian question, but also make greater efforts for Palestine's social and economic development and reconstruction during the transitional period.

The Chinese Government and people have always closely followed the Palestinian question, sympathized with the Palestinian people in their sufferings in the past, supported the just cause of the Palestinian people and supported and vigorously promoted the Middle East peace process. We heartily rejoice at the positive progress made by the parties concerned through political negotiations and have ardent hopes for further progress. China is ready to participate in the reconstruction of the Palestinian self-rule areas. Since the signing of the Palestine-Israel Agreement, the Chinese Government has provided financial and material support, within its capacity, for economic development in the Palestinian self-rule areas in addition to continued contributions to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. The Chinese Government will also soon provide a grant of 8 million yuan renminbi to the Palestinian Self-Governing Authority. Moreover, the Chinese Government has decided to set up an office in the Palestinian self-rule areas and will accredit a permanent representative to it.

In the future, China will, as always, continue to make its own efforts, together with the international community and the peoples of the Middle East, for the final settlement of the Middle East question, including the question of Palestine, and the realization of peace and development in the Middle East in a comprehensive, fair and reasonable manner.

Mr. Ahamed (India): My delegation is happy to speak today, the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. This day underlines the support of the international community for the people of Palestine in their quest for peace and justice and the realization of their legitimate goals and aspirations.

India's bond of friendship with the Palestinian people is firm and unshakable. It needs no reaffirmation. Our historical contacts covered almost every aspect of human life and endeavour: cultural, social, religious, economic and political. This tradition has been renewed and strengthened in modern times. As testimony to our ongoing support of the Palestinian National Authority, the Government of India has, from July 1995, recognized the passport and travel documents issued by the Palestinian National Authority. India has also decided to establish a liaison office in Gaza.

During the past two years, historic developments of far-reaching consequence have taken place. These have been the results of initiatives undertaken by the visionary leadership of Palestine and Israel to end the chapter of feuding and bloodshed and usher in a new era of peace, stability and coexistence. My delegation salutes the courage and the spirit of accommodation and optimism that have produced the blueprints for a new *modus vivendi* in the region.

India wholeheartedly welcomed the signing on 28 September 1995 of the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. It is a significant step in the implementation of the Declaration Principles signed on 13 September 1993. Much, however, remains to be tackled and resolved.

The road to the present juncture has been long and arduous. It has been paved with numerous sacrifices, including lives of those devoted to establishing peace. In this context, may I take the opportunity to convey to the General Assembly deep condolences on the tragic assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. We are however, gratified to note that the courage displayed by the leadership will continue to be sustained and that efforts to find a lasting solution will be further intensified.

There is general recognition that support for the peace process cannot be confined to the political track. It

is necessary to focus on the multifaceted tasks of nation-building. The Palestinian Authority will require assistance, particularly in the fields of health, education and the creation of employment. Infrastructure development will be a primary area of focus. The challenge posed by the pressing requirements of finance and technological support merit the urgent attention of the international community.

The convening of the Middle East and North Africa Economic Summit in Amman in October 1995 was an imaginative and far-sighted step, as it brought world statesmen, corporate leaders, financiers, technocrats and diplomats together for a focused discussion on ways to ensure the economic betterment of the region and its people. Regional cooperation, reinforced by global inputs, is an essential means of building prosperity and peace.

India will continue, in its own modest way, to extend to the Palestinian people material and technical assistance to consolidate their progress towards self-government and nation-building.

We recognize that it is the duty of all of us to work together to help move the peace process in West Asia forward. However, the really meaningful impetus for a permanent and lasting solution will have to come from the parties themselves. We are confident that, having made a breakthrough in neutralizing the long-standing areas of conflict, the leaderships of Palestine and of Israel will, together, work out plans for future coexistence with the same commitment as they have displayed so far. We trust that the momentum generated in the process of working towards a negotiated settlement of all issues that have caused strife in the area will be maintained.

Mr. Lamamra (Algeria) (*interpretation from Arabic*): I should like, at the outset, to thank the Secretary-General and the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for the very important reports on this that have been submitted for the information of the Member States of the latest developments in the question of Palestine and of the future expectations in that respect.

The history of the Palestinian question is bound up with the history of the United Nations, which is responsible for finding a comprehensive solution to this question. That is especially true this year, in which the international community celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations.

Today we celebrate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, and we do so in the light of new, important and positive developments aimed at the attainment of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East, after long years of war and tragedies.

Algeria has welcomed the positive developments in the Middle East peace process, especially the agreements reached between the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel since September 1993 and subsequent steps. We think that the Declaration of Principles did represent in actual fact a turning-point, which will affect the history of the region if we redouble our efforts and focus on the need to achieve a just and lasting peace between the peoples of this vital region of the world, on the basis of relevant United Nations resolutions.

We have also noted the positive developments on the Jordanian-Israeli track.

Nevertheless, we have expressed understandable concern about the delays and procrastination in implementing the agreements between the Palestinians and the Israelis, in view of the negative impact of such phenomena on the performance of the Palestine National Authority and even on the credibility of the peace process itself. In fact, we are worried by persistent hurdles that prevent the Palestinian leadership from extending its sovereignty to the lands covered by the self-government agreements, as well as by the settlement activities, which are financed by private capital under the protection of the occupying authority, and the confiscation of lands and economic blockades, which prevent the inhabitants of the region from engaging in vital activities. The standard of living of the inhabitants of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, has actually deteriorated since September 1993.

Delay in the achievement of a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East will simply mean further instability, more tension and more violence, all of which threaten security and peace in the region as a whole and open the door wide to those extremists who wish to subvert every peaceful effort.

Terrorism in all its forms has become an international phenomenon that spares no one. We have seen its ugly face in Algeria, the United States, Japan, Saudi Arabia and the Gaza Strip, and it was highlighted recently by the assassination of the Israeli Prime Minister Rabin and the bombing of the Egyptian embassy in Islamabad. The common denominator in the case of all

extremists, regardless of nationality, is that their aggression and bloodthirsty behaviour stem from religious slogans and the illusion that they are privy to absolute truths that give them licence to invoke religion in committing their crimes.

As terrorism has become one of the most dangerous contemporary challenges, action will have to be intensified in combating terrorism if the peace process in the Middle East is to be protected. Here, I must mention the importance of international cooperation, under the umbrella of the United Nations, to put an end to terrorism. Member States must do their utmost to achieve this goal. It is not enough to refrain from supporting terrorism; it is necessary for every State to combat it by every legitimate means, both in word and in deed.

The question of the Holy City of Al-Quds lies at the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict because of its importance in the lives of both the Arab and the Muslim worlds. We therefore believe that the future of the peace process depends on the manner in which that problem is approached. It now seems that this question is to be dealt with in the final phase of the peace negotiations. This is understandable if the idea is first to create the confidence needed to enable all the parties to discuss such a highly sensitive issue successfully. We therefore believe that the Israeli authorities should desist as of now from taking any measures designed to alter in any radical way the very nature of Al-Quds. We also feel that the Member States of the United Nations must refrain from establishing or transferring embassies or diplomatic representatives there.

In addition to the Holy City of Al-Quds we have the problem of the Lebanese and Syrian occupied territories. It is impossible to achieve the desired peace in the Middle East without Israel's full and unconditional withdrawal from all the occupied Arab territories. Here, we wish to reiterate our support for the efforts of the Lebanese Government to extend its sovereignty over all its national territory in conformity with Security Council resolution 425 (1978), which calls upon Israel to withdraw forthwith to its internationally recognized borders. We express the same solidarity and support with regard to the legitimate position of Syria in its insistence on the return of the Golan Heights.

We are fully confident that a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the region must be founded on the implementation of the resolutions of international legality and the principle of land for peace, on enabling the Palestinian people to exercise its right to self-determination and to establish its own State in its homeland, on confidence-building measures amongst the countries of the region, on the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction and on the achievement of balanced security side by side with an economic environment that would benefit all the peoples of the region.

This outstanding session in the history of the United Nations will have risen to this great challenge if it results in the adoption of resolutions that would be in keeping with the principles and purposes of the Charter and that would contribute to steering the peace process in the right direction.

Announcement

The President: I wish to make an announcement concerning agenda item 23 — "Restructuring and revitalization of the United Nations in the economic, social and related fields".

I should like to inform members that I have appointed His Excellency Mr. Oscar De Rojas, Deputy Permanent Representative of Venezuela to the United Nations, to be the coordinator of the informal consultations on the draft resolution to be submitted under the agenda item.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.